



United States Senator
Richard Shelby
REPORTS TO ALABAMA



GROWING NECESSITY OF U. S. NATIONAL MISSILE DEFENSE

As the nation's military planners wrestle to formulate a national security strategy that addresses the uncertainty of the post-Cold War world, one key assumption they must consider is that our future adversaries will focus attacks where we are most vulnerable or on what is commonly referred to as an "Achilles heel." A challenge to the United States on the conventional battlefield would be foolish since we remain the world's recognized preeminent fighting force. Our enemies are more likely to use inexpensive and more attainable weapons that exploit our vulnerabilities at home and abroad. Clearly, the ballistic missile has emerged as the most ominous threat because the United States is defenseless against a ballistic missile attack.

Despite our vulnerability to a missile attack and our technical ability to develop a system to counter the threat, the Clinton Administration opposes deploying a national missile defense system. The Clinton Administration has justified its lack of commitment to missile defense by citing past intelligence reports that estimate that no credible threat will mature for another ten to 15 years. This line of reasoning is as short-sighted as the new homeowner who defers buying fire insurance because the likelihood of his house catching fire, while a real threat, is remote.

Furthermore, and perhaps more troubling, is the fact that these reports have been flatly contradicted. Out of concern that the reports prepared by the Intelligence Community used rosy assumptions and reached highly politicized conclusions, Congress commissioned a blue ribbon panel to reassess the nature of the ballistic missile threat. The bipartisan Ballistic Missile Threat Commission, led by former Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, reached the conclusion that the "the threat to the U.S. ... is broader, more mature and evolving more rapidly" than officially

estimated. Therefore, the Rumsfeld report determined that hostile nations could threaten the United States within five years of deciding to acquire ballistic missile capability, a decision which likely can be concealed from the U. S. intelligence community.

The sobering conclusions of the Rumsfeld Commission were confirmed just one week after the release of its report when Iran conducted a flight test of its new, medium-range ballistic missile. On July 22, Iran launched the 900-mile-range Shahab-3, a missile capable of striking Israel, Russia, and Turkey. While the launch itself did not catch the Intelligence Community by surprise as did the series of nuclear explosions in India earlier this year, the test came much sooner than predicted. Last year, CIA Director George Tenet testified before the Senate Intelligence Committee that it would take ten years for Iran to build such a missile. Even under a worst-case scenario, the Pentagon assumed that Iran could not test the Shahab-3 any sooner than mid-1999. Clearly, Iran's test serves as a stark reminder that Tehran is well on its way to acquiring the technology and expertise needed to achieve its goal of building an intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) and targeting the United States.

A more ominous development occurred a month later when the North Korea launched the Taepo Dong-1 missile. In a shot literally across our bow, Pyongyang once again fired the ballistic missile over Japan. This is significant because it was the first time Pyongyang tested a two-stage missile, a major technical breakthrough which allows for extended range. On hand to watch the Taepo Dong-1 launch were observers from Iran, Syria, Pakistan, and Libya. Furthermore, the ability to build rockets in stages opens the door to developing ICBMs. With Pyong-yang's announcement to continue to sell ballistic missile technol-

ogy, the proliferation of multi-stage rocket technology is virtually assured.

As the Rumsfeld Commission concluded, and recent events confirmed, an official intelligence estimate is just that, an estimate. We should recognize that the spread of missile technology is occurring at a rate that cannot be accurately predicted. We must realize that the ballistic missile has become a symbol of military might, a symbol of national prestige and stature for developing nations. At the same time, the evidence shows that these countries will proliferate missile technology and expertise. Our enemies appreciate the political clout that comes with the ability to target U.S. population centers. Therefore, they are determined to develop or acquire ballistic missiles. Clearly, it is time to chart a new course.

Given the evidence presented, I was especially dismayed that a motion to consider legislation that would assure the United States' expedient deployment of a technologically feasible and effective national missile defense failed by one vote in the U. S. Senate. I simply cannot fathom how my colleagues or the Clinton Administration can remain so incredibly short-sighted as the safety of the American people, both at home and abroad, is at stake. Frankly, continued delay in deploying a national missile defense system is an unconscionable risk that we cannot afford to take. Failing to act now, only serves to taunt those who are keenly aware of our nation's vulnerabilities, and are gaining the means to deliver an attack from which we are unable to defend ourselves. I can only hope that my colleagues and members of the Clinton Administration who continue to deny that the threat is real, or whether it is "affordable" to protect American lives will recognize this growing threat and will join me and others in working toward the expedient development and deployment of a national missile defense system.